LAND OF THE SARDINE

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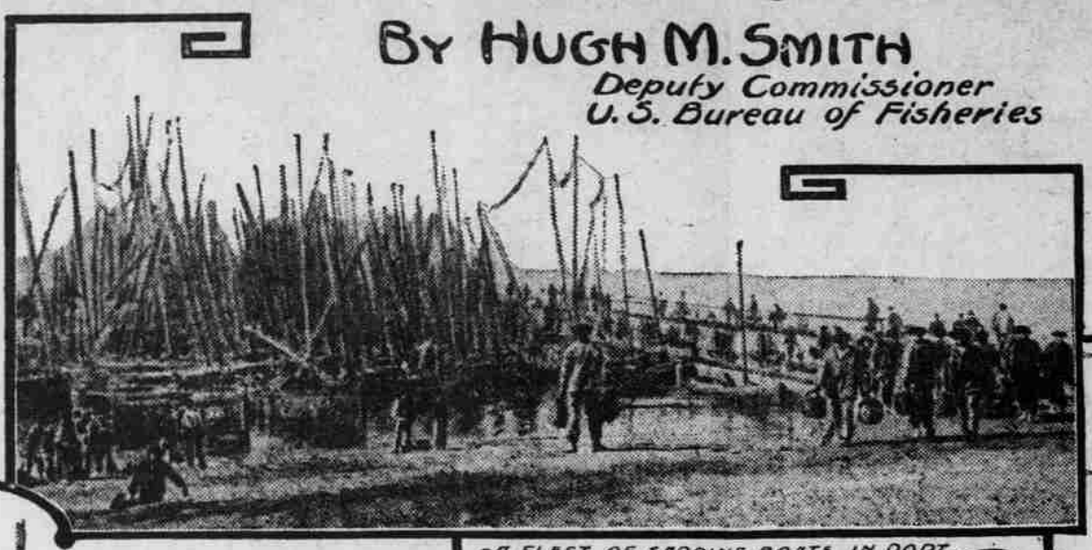


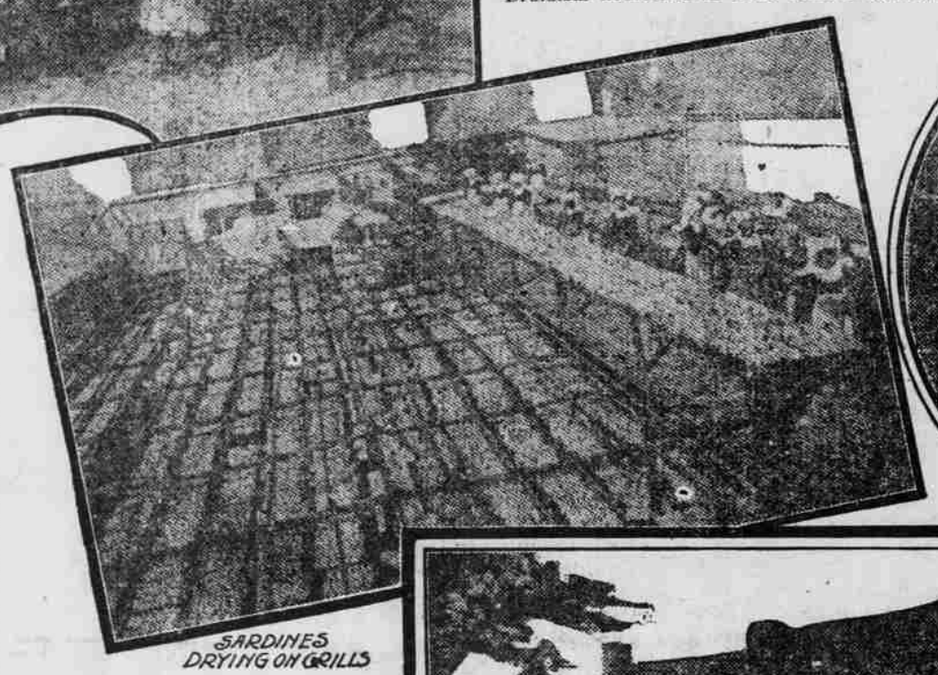
A FLEET OF SARDINE BOATS IN PORT

OCCUPYING the large peninsula at the northwestern corner of France—washed by the English channel and the Bay of Biscay—is a rugged country, with rugged inhabitants, who are less French than any other people of the republic. Brittany has no political existence and is not even represented on some modern maps, because it terminated its individual career in the closing years of the eighteenth century; but the Bretons, differing in ancestry, language and temperament from their neighbors, have held aloof and maintained their racial characters in a way almost unparalleled in European history. Fierce wars have left their scars and the concomitants of modern civilization have made their enduring impress on people and country; but so much of the ancient customs and landmarks has survived that Brittany is still a well-marked geographical and ethnological entity and bids fair to remain such for many generations.

ASSORTING AND ARRANGING SARDINES FOR DRYING IN A CANNERY

This isolation of Brittany from the remainder of France, while at the same time the province is comparatively easy to reach and traverse, has for many years made it a popular holiday and vacation resort for Parisians and Londoners and has attracted the notice of regular travelers and tourists who, having "done" the Alps, the Rhine, the Norwegian fjords, the Riviera and the European capitals, are seeking new worlds to conquer. Artists of all lands have likewise found this a most agreeable field for work and recreation. The popularity of the region is attested by a score of modern books of travel, some written and illustrated by clever artists, describing the quaint charm of country and people and always giving the reader a keen desire to go and see for himself.

Some years ago I was privileged to visit Brittany in the interest of the bureau of fisheries and the personal observations I then made incidental to the special inquiries in hand form the basis for these necessarily desultory remarks



SARDINES DRYING ON GRILLS

The original name of Brittany was Armorica, which was changed in consequence of extensive immigration from Great Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries. The Armorican tribes formed a part of that race of which the Irish, Highland Scotch and Manx constitute one division and the Welsh, Cornish and Breton the other. The Celtic language there spoken at the present time is divided into three or four rather distinct dialects and is understood, if not actually used by a very large percentage of the native population. Many of the older Bretons cannot speak French and in 1902 it was found that the French language was unknown or unused by 700,000 of the people. The government now requires the learning of French by the young, so we may expect the gradual disuse and final death of this ancient tongue.

Taking a brief glance at the history of Brittany, we may note that at a very remote period this country became thickly settled by a dark-skinned people that, starting a westward migration from some part of Asia, left monuments along their route throughout central and northern Europe and only ceased their wanderings when stopped by the sea in Scandinavia, Ireland, Great Britain, France, Portugal and Spain. In prehistoric times the Gauls conquered this early race, and then came the Roman conquest and the Roman occupation of Gaul until the fourth century, up to which time the peculiar religious practices of the aboriginal race appear to have flourished unmolested by either Gauls or Romans.

We read that in 383 Maximilian, son-in-law of Octavius of England, and his nephew, Conan Meriadec, went over to Armorica and endeavored to displace the Romans. This venture cost the lives of some 15,000 soldiers. Then Maximilian took over a huge army and eventually overcame the Romans. Conan became king of the country, which he called Little Britain, or Bretagne, and, making his capital at Nantes, he invited his countrymen, who were then very hard pressed by the Scots and Picts and Saxons, to come over and join him. Many thousands responded to this and subsequent invitations and by the time of Conan's death, in 421, Christianity, that had been introduced with the Briton immigrants, had been established and paganism almost abolished over a large part of the country.

In the middle ages the dukes of Brittany exercised semi-royal prerogatives and the people had a separate parliament for many years preceding the French revolution. At the outbreak of that momentous struggle the Bretons lived up to their reputation for conservatism and remained loyal to the monarchy and forcibly resisted the establishment of the republic long after the other parts of France had accepted the new regime. This sanguinary chapter in the history of the country has been vividly portrayed in Balzac's stirring novel, "The Chouans."

GOING TO MARKET

The Britons, at first friends and kindred of the Bretons, eventually became their hereditary enemies. For centuries the British privateers and naval vessels ravaged the coast, blockaded the harbors, bombarded the towns, landed fighting parties and the long-continued and deep-seated animosity thus engendered still abides in this land, where changes in habits and customs and sentiment occur very slowly.

The present population of Brittany is about 3,260,000. The principal cities are Brest, the great naval port of France, beautifully located on one of the best harbors in all Europe; Rennes, in the interior, brought prominently to the world's notice some years ago as the scene of Dreyfus' first trial; and Nantes, on the Loire, the largest and one of the most interesting places in all Brittany. Its chief attraction is its hoary age and romantic history. It is mentioned by Caesar, Pliny and other writers of their time and was a city of note long before Caesar divided all Gaul into three parts. In the middle ages it was one of the most valuable possessions of the semi-royal dukes of Brittany and when, in 1499, Anne of Brittany here wedded Louis XII. it passed to the crown of France. During the revolution it was the scene of the most atrocious massacres, and in 1793 fully 30,000 men, women and children were here butchered.

Every observant traveler soon realizes that the dominant note in the Breton character is the universal and ineradicable belief in a higher power, which is not only worshipped, but is regarded as influencing or determining every incident in their daily lives. Most peculiar religious superstitions are current; witchcraft, charms and antidotes are believed in, and fairies and other creatures of a childlike imagination here have a very real existence to both young and old.

All of the people are now nominally Christians, but Druidism flourished in some remote sections as late as the seventeenth century, and it is an interesting fact that the veneration accorded the heathen deities in the earliest centuries of Breton history was easily transferred to the Holy Family and the Christian saints when the new religion reached the country. In no other part of Europe, if indeed in any other part of the world, has Christianity absorbed so much of earlier creeds, and it requires no particularly astute observer to appreciate that many features of Breton religious practice today are relics of prehistoric paganism.

A BRETON PEASANT'S COTTAGE

It is easy to understand how the superstitious temperament of the Bretons has been developed by their isolated geographical position and the impressive character of the country, by their distinct language and by their being brought constantly in contact with those strange megalithic remains which are here more numerous than anywhere else.

A sympathetic foreigner has given an admirable estimate of Brittany and the Breton character that should always be borne in mind:

"Those who would wish to see Brittany as she really is must not look at her wild and barren plains, her bleak, dreary mountains, her dark and sombre forests, her stormy and rock-bound shores and her lonely, lovely valleys with the hasty glance they cast on any other passing landscape, with the hard practical eye and fastidious tastes of modern travelers; they must think of her as the land that has been consecrated by the earliest feats of chivalry, perhaps the only spot in the modern world that has preserved in her legends untarnished the 'eternal youth of phantasy.' Here, it is not only 'the spirit that haunts the last years' bowers,' but the spirit of ages past, that looks you in the face.

"The traveler must not regard the melancholy Breton, alternately taciturn and eloquent, simply as an unlettered and morose peasant, but as a being cradled in superstition, endowed by nature and education with a vivid imagination, with a deep, true, poetical sense, with strong and gloomy religious views, to whom the 'spirit-land' is an ever-present, an ever-living reality, and who idemnifies himself for his hard lot on earth by a constant reference to the future joys of heaven."

Brittany is a small country. Its extreme length from north to south is only 150 miles, and its greatest width is about the same. The area is 13,600 square miles, or a little larger than the entire state of Maryland.

The abundance of stone everywhere and the scarcity of timber in many places have determined the building material for most of the houses, churches and other structures in Brittany. When for any reason building stone is scarce or otherwise lacking, the people have often had recourse to the prehistoric monuments for their homes and churches.

The churches afford most fascinating material for the study of the architect and the antiquarian. Beginning with the eleventh century, they present a most interesting record of the evolution and progress of ecclesiastical architecture. Large castles are rare and in practically every community it is the church that is the most imposing structure.

BRETON PEASANTS

SHRINE AND SPRING

The houses of peasants and fishermen are for the most part small, one-storied, with deep, thatched roof. In a few places I noticed the walls formed entirely of upright granite blocks seven or eight feet high. Windows (often without glass) are small, few in number and not infrequently altogether lacking in the poorest houses.

The floors are of dirt, which is often converted into mud and remains so, and the interiors are usually chilly and cheerless. In many families there is a common bedroom in each house, with a bed in each corner, and it is no unusual thing to find the same room shared by a litter of pigs and perhaps several goats.

But the leading product of the waters of Brittany is the sardine. This country has its own peculiar attractions for the artist, the archeologist, the linguist and other specialists, and even ordinary tourists are often impelled to extend their travels thither; but the feature which appeals most strongly to the greatest number of Americans affects not their esthetic, artistic or scientific tastes, but their gastronomic, through the medium of the canned sardine. Other countries and other parts of France produce sardines, but the sardine par excellence comes from Brittany.

Brittany is the center of the sardine fishery and has all of the numerous establishments for the canning of the fish. In an average season the Brittany sardine fishermen number 25,000 to 30,000 and catch 100,000,000 to 150,000,000 pounds of sardines, for which they receive $1,500,000 to $3,000,000, while the shore industries dependent on the fishery give employment to 20,000 other persons, mostly women and girls. So important is the sardine that in many communities in Brittany every person is directly or indirectly supported by it, and the failure of the fish to come means ruin, starvation and death to many people in the more isolated places.

Sardines are found on the coasts of Brittany throughout the year, but occur in greatest abundance in summer and autumn. The small fish, in demand for canning purposes, have been hatched from eggs laid in the previous summer at a considerable distance from the land and go in schools at or near the surface. As many as 100,000 have been taken at one time in one net from one school, but the usual size of the schools is not remarkably large.

Like other free-swimming oceanic fish, of which the mackerel, bluefish and herring are conspicuous examples, the sardine varies in abundance from year to year and at times has been exceedingly scarce on the French coasts. Thus, from 1887 to 1890, there was an alarming scarcity, but after this four-year period the fish returned in as great numbers as ever.

Again, from 1902 to 1906, the sardine disappeared almost completely, only to be followed by a period of great abundance. All sorts of theories have been advanced to account for these periods of scarcity, which appear to be coming more frequently than formerly.

FOR THE COOK BOOK

RECIPES THAT ARE WELL WORTH PRESERVING.

Cornelia C. Bedford, Former Principal of the New York Cooking School, Originated and Recommends Them.

Belle Pudding—Take some stale bread, remove all crust and reduce the white portion to fine light crumbs. Butter the right number of cups or individual molds, put in the bottom of each a candied cherry or a slice of some home fruit such as canned or preserved peaches drained and made quite dry, then lightly filled with crumbs. Having measured to see how much liquid would be needed, allow for each cupful of milk two well-beaten eggs, one tablespoonful and a half of sugar, a pinch of salt and a half-teaspoonful of vanilla. Beat eggs and sugar and add the scalding hot milk. Baste this slowly over the crumbs in the molds until all is used. Stand the molds in a pan of hot water and bake in a moderate oven until set in the center. Turn out on saucers and pour around each, just before sending to the table, any nice sauce, or heat the juice of canned fruit and thicken very slightly with cornstarch.

The next time dissolve a heaping teaspoonful of cocoa in each cupful of milk and you will have chocolate puddings. The third time mix with the bread some ground spice in the proportion of one teaspoonful of cinnamon, a half-teaspoonful of nutmeg and one-quarter each of cloves and allspice; this entitles it to be called spice pudding.

Cherry Bread—Cut stale bread in thin slices and thickly butter each. Open a quart can of cherries, dilute the syrup with an equal amount of boiling water, heat to the boiling point, add the cherries and one teaspoonful of corn starch wet in cold water. Stir and boil for three minutes. Put two slices of the bread side by side on a dish and pour over them a part of the hot syrup and fruit. Add two more slices and more of the fruit, then two more with the remainder. Set all aside until very cold. Just before serving cover top and sides with a meringue and serve with plain cream.

Queenie—Make a cold raw custard with three eggs, two tablespoonfuls of sugar and a pinch of salt for each pint of milk. Cut thick slices of stale bread and trim to an even size. Spread on a flat pan and baste over them as much of the raw custard as they will soak up. When perfectly soft all through, heat a spoonful of butter in the frying pan, and in it fry as many slices at a time as can be accommodated withiut crowding. Brown quickly, turn and brown on the other side. When done, pile very evenly on a buttered dish, spreading each slice with a thick layer of marmalade. When all are done cover top and sides with a thick layer of meringue. Sprinkle liberally with powdered sugar and place in a moderate oven until lightly colored.

Simple Fruit Pudding—Two cupfuls of crumbled stale bread, two of crumbled stale cake, mixed together. Pour over one cupful of milk and let stand an hour to soak. Add a half-cupful of melted butter, a half-cupful of molasses, three-quarters of a cupful each of seeded raisins and chopped citron, a half-teaspoonful of cinnamon, a quarter of a teaspoonful each of cloves, allspice, mace and salt, one teaspoonful of soda dissolved in a tablespoonful of cold water. Mix well, turn into a buttered mold and steam for three hours. Serve with a hard sauce beaten until very creamy and flavored with vanilla.

English Walnut Pudding.

One-half cup butter, two eggs, one cup sugar, one cup milk, one cup of chopped walnuts, one cup of chopped raisins, one cup of currants, two tablespoons of baking powder, and flour enough to make a stiff batter. Bake in three layers. Make a custard of one quart of milk, three eggs, a pinch of salt and corn starch enough to thicken. Use any flavor. Put a layer of cake and then custard, alternately. Frost with the whites of two eggs, beaten stiff, and place half walnuts on the top.

Almond Wafers.

Cream one-half cup butter, add slowly one cup powdered sugar, one-half cup milk, drop by drop; then add 1⅞ cups bread flour, one-half teaspoon extract of almonds. Spread very thin on bottom of dripping pan inverted and buttered; mark in squares; sprinkle with almonds blanched and chopped fine, and bake in moderate oven five minutes. Roll in tubular shape while warm. Set pan on back of range while rolling wafers as they become brittle very quickly.

Batter for Fritters.

Yolks of two eggs, one-half cup of cold water; stir in one cup of flour. If a little too thick add a trifle more water, one-half teaspoon salt, one tablespoon olive oil. Beat briskly, then add the stiffly beaten whites of two eggs. Set aside for a few hours. The olive oil gives a beautiful brown tint to the fritter which nothing else will give. Use deep, clear lard to fry them in.

Plum Pie.

Line a plate with nice paste and bake. Then fill with stewed plums, well sweetened, and cover with a meringue, made from the whites of two eggs whipped stiff with two tablespoons of sugar and put in the oven to brown rapidly.